

Policy Paper

Reut's Broad Tent and Red-Lines Approach

Background

The concepts of 'broad tent' (initially framed as 'open tent') and 'red lines' were created by the Reut Institute in response to our diagnostics of the strategy of the assault on the State of Israel's legitimacy (hereinafter 'delegitimization'), and particularly of the BDS movement. Reut understood that one of the secrets of their success, in spite of their radical anti-Israel views, which deny Israel's right to exist, has been their willingness to overlook ideological differences and to collaborate tactically with groups and individuals that who are 'just' critical of Israeli policies, and even self-proclaimed Zionists and Israelis.

The two most notable successes of this approach have been the Goldstone Report and the Gaza Flotilla. In the former, Hamas collaborated with Judge Goldstone, who is a self-described as Zionist, to produce the infamous report. In the latter, Hamas played an active role in producing the Flotilla, where most of the participants were not 'delegitimizers', who reject Israel's right to exist, but were simply critical of Israel's policy toward Gaza. We framed their approach as 'open tent'.

Meanwhile, Reut saw that the Government of Israel, and many Jewish organizations, took the opposite approach, where disagreement over and criticism of Israeli policies led to harsh consequences such as blacklisting or even limitations on access to Israel. We framed this approach as 'closed tent'.

The confluence of the delegitimizers' 'open tent' approach with Israel's 'closed tent' approach led to Israel's camp being outnumbered, with the centerfield seized by Israel's adversaries. Notwithstanding other issues, this confluence was a central cause for Israel being overwhelmed in 2006-09 by the global, systemic offense of the campaign for its delegitimization, as well as for its response being local and situational. Indeed, over the past years, the delegitimization campaign has driven a wedge between many Jews and Jewish communities and Israel, turning Israel from a unifying force into a divisive one in some communities. This dynamic is described in Reut's strategic conceptual framework.

Broad Tent and Red-Lines as Pillars of Response Strategy

Hence, Reut created the 'broad tent' approach as one of the key concepts and pillars of the systemic global response to the delegitimization campaign.

The logic was that the most effective voices against delegitimization often come from the 'left', as well as from non-establishment 'fringe' groups, particularly because of their ideological proximity to the (false) pretention of delegitimizers to serve peace, human rights and international law. The tension here stems from the fact that the credibility of such voices often stem from their criticism of Israel's policies or of mainstream Jewish organizations. Hence, we needed to increase the band-width of

tolerance for criticism of Israel's policies in order to win the fight against the delegitimizers by adding instruments to our orchestra, so to speak.

Yet, the broad tent approach must be compounded by complementary principles such as:

- Narrowing the definition of 'delegitimization' (Reut suggested delegitimization to mean the rejection of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination or of the State of Israel to exist), and then aggressively outing, naming and shaming delegitimizers;
- Substantive engagement with critics of Israel's policy, even with those whose approach is biased and unfair (so long as they are not delegitimizers), by building personal relationships with key people, as platforms for discussing policy issues;
- Branding Israel 'beyond the conflict' for the majority of those that do not know much or care about the conflict;
- It takes a network to fight a network: Israel and the Jewish world must strengthen its network and deploy it;
- Establishing red-lines with regards to the discourse about Israel between legitimate criticism and acts of delegitimization. Such boundaries are necessary as, in some cases, organizations and individuals have been unknowingly fueling the delegitimization campaign;

Reut believes that following these simple principles would prove to be effective in turning the tide against the delegitimizers, helping Israel and its allies to recapture center field, isolate and marginalize the delegitimizers, and reengage with groups that had been hitherto pushed away.

Yet, Reut also believes that delineating such red-lines must be a grass-roots community based exercise, and cannot be imposed top-down by the Government of Israel or by Jewish community institutions. There is great value in local communities, synagogues, communal organizations and grassroots organizations grappling with the question, because such red lines are often contextual. Such a debate is essential in order to form an ideologically diverse coalition that will credibly and effectively confront the delegitimization of Israel, and may, in fact, create an opportunity to reconnect across the dividing lines within our communities, and to re-engage with Israel in new ways.

Where Does Reut Stand on These Issues?

- **Definition of de-legitimization:** Reut defines delegitimization as the negation of the right of the State of Israel to exist and the right of the Jewish people to self-determination. We are fully aware that there are few explicit delegitimizers, but many more implicit ones, who can be recognized by their substantive positions such as by rejecting the principle of two-states-for-two-peoples or by supporting the right of return of refugees, as well as by repeatedly failing to offer a single context where any of Israel's actions could be understood, if not supported.

- **What are the red-lines?** – Reut believes that establishing ‘red lines’ is essential and complementary to the ‘broad tent’ approach, but also that such lines must be delineated based on a community-wide deliberation. Hence, Reut has repeatedly refused to partake in this debate, except for the following:
 - **The minimal threshold for entry to the ‘tent’** is supporting the right of the State of Israel to exist and of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination based on the principle of two-states-for-two-people; working to offer a single context for understanding Israel’s actions; giving Israel the benefit of doubt; and the elusive criteria of ‘love’ or, at least, ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’ for Israel;
 - **Guilt by association:** The BDS movement is a delegitimizing movement, and therefore acts of BDS within this movement are unacceptable.
- **Organizations on the cusp:** Some organizations that self-describe as ‘pro-Israel’, and support the right of the Jewish people to self-determination and of the State of Israel to exist, house or support activities that are borderline or even beyond the pale of the broad tent concept. Reut’s approach with regards to such organizations has been to engage directly and substantively with their leadership, and to work with those individuals whose personal positions and activities are clearly within the tent in order to influence the overall organizational performance.

Putting Reut’s Ideas to Work

Reut has been involved in a few initiatives to put these ideas to work:

- We were partners in an initiative led by Prof. Gil Troy from McGill University, which, with the participation of groups from across the political spectrum, produced a document clearly establishing red lines entitled ‘[Restoring Sanity to the Israel Discourse: Red Lines against De-legitimization; Blue-&-White Lines for Fair Play.](#)’
- We were also involved in Hillel’s effort to establish the Hillel Guidelines for Campus Israel Activities (see <http://www.hillel.org/israel/guidelines.htm>). Following this, Brandeis University’s Hillel voted to reject the membership bid of the local campus chapter of an organization that has been criticized for its support of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) ([click here](#)).
- The broad tent and red lines approach was also a guiding logic behind [the Reut-AJC conference](#), which took place in Washington DC a few months ago. We brought together hundreds of activists from around the world from across the political spectrum in order to mobilize a networked, global and systemic response to delegitimization. The discussion of the red lines concept was central to the conference.
- Reut also worked with other smaller organizations on their approach to this issue. We are regularly meeting with human rights and progressive organizations to discuss the red lines concept, as well as with the Government of Israel, Jewish community institutions and more conservative groups to discuss the broad tent concept.

The concepts of 'broad tent' and 'red lines', which we created, have become buzzwords and subject of internal debate. We believe that the very fact that these organizations are willing to hold this kind of conversation in the first place represents real progress, and this is only the beginning of this campaign.

End.